

OPENING STATEMENT
"Betrayal: Quality of Care in California Nursing Homes"
Tuesday, July 28, 1998
SENATOR JOHN BREAUX
RANKING MEMBER

Mr. Chairman, I commend you for taking the lead on this important issue and calling for these two days of hearings. Of the wide range of issues that we have studied in this Committee - - preserving Social Security, strengthening Medicare, protecting consumers against fraud, to name a few - - none are more important than protecting the welfare of our most vulnerable citizens.

I join you in making it clear to nursing home residents and employees, to policymakers in state and federal government, and all Americans, that this indeed *is* an important issue, one that deserves a close examination. Our goal, Mr. Chairman, must be to find solutions to the problems we will hear about today - - and find them quickly.

Yesterday, we heard testimony from those who have been victimized by an ineffective system. Several of our witnesses traveled great distances to tell their stories, and I commend them for their efforts and thank them for sharing their testimonies.

Chairman Grassley, I strongly feel that security for seniors is more than just the financial security of their health care programs. Their personal security must also be guaranteed. People should be confident that if their mother or father is in a nursing home they are getting the quality care they deserve.

Today, the General Accounting Office, which did a study for the Chairman and me, will report that the current nursing home inspection process may not be doing what it was intended to do: protect residents against harm and neglect. Particularly troublesome is that in some cases state surveyors missed problems that affected the safety and health of nursing home residents, and that even when such problems were identified, enforcement actions did not necessarily ensure that the problems were corrected and did not recur. Any oversight system that lets that happen must be fixed.

I also look forward to hearing from the Health Care Financing Administration and industry representatives to hear about what they are doing now to ensure that nursing homes provide quality care. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you, the Administration, resident advocates, and representatives of the industry to ensure that we never have to have a hearing of this kind again.